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SUBJECT: ARMENIAN PRESS BLASTS TURKISH RECEPTION OF  
CATHOLICOS GAREGIN II

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. Armenian cultural and political leaders blasted the GOT in the press following an incident during which a group of about 50 protesters reportedly egged cars carrying Armenian religious dignitaries on their way to meet the leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church at the Istanbul airport. According to the press, the visit of Catholicos Garegin II to Turkey was the third such visit by an Armenian religious leader since 1961. Most news reports on the visit focused on the protest, while other stories covered the reactions of Armenian National Assembly Speaker Tigran Torosyan and other Armenian cultural and political figures to the news. AZG, a center-right daily paper, criticized the Constantinople Patriarchate for publishing information on the visit only on its Turkish-language website, and not on its English- and Armenian-languages sites. End Summary.

¶2. Many Armenian news outlets carried reports of the airport protest, running headlines including "Istanbul incident during visit of Catholicos of All Armenia is barbarism," and "Scandal at Istanbul airport proves that process of democracy establishment in Turkey remains at low level." A news story on the website of government-run ArmRadio concluded with this purely editorial comment: "Although the accident was not that serious, it wholly expressed the essence of the people, which has taken the course towards the European Union."

¶3. According to reports, Torosyan questioned Turkey's European Union aspirations, saying that the protest demonstrated definitively that the Turkish people do not share European values and culture. He also suggested that GOT Prime Minister Erdogan not address issues of freedom of religion when he addresses the next session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), implying that discussion of the topic would be hypocritical. News outlets also quoted writer Razmik Davoyan expressing sentiments similar to those of Torosyan. Davoyan said Turkey's EU aspirations were inconsistent with "hatred" of Armenia. He said incidents such as the Istanbul airport protest would not occur in Armenia, because Armenia's social values preclude such behavior.

¶4. The independent online news outlet Panorama.am covered a meeting of the Pakagits discussion club on June 23, during which the club invited political and cultural leaders to discuss the Catholicos's visit. According to the article, the discussion group participants uniformly criticized the airport protest, but did not agree on whether the protest had been sponsored by the GOT.

15. AZG noted that Lraber, the official bulletin of the Constantinople Patriarchate, posted information about the Catholicos's visit on its Turkish-language webpage, and not on its English- or Armenian-language pages. AZG noted that while Armenians who live in Istanbul speak Turkish, it is not a lingua franca among diasporan Armenians or Armenians in Armenia. "By posting information on the Turkish-language page only, Lraber has deprived Armenians in the Diaspora and Armenia of the opportunity to get information on the visit of Garegin II so as to limit the response to the visit of the Catholicos," AZG reported.

EVANS